

CHALLENGES OF THE ELDERLY

It is of paramount importance to look into the issues that affect the elderly people generally in the world and particularly in our community. For some of us to really understand this set of people, we need to know who they are.

Who is an elderly?

An elderly is an individual that is 65 years and above. These people can be grouped into two;

The elderly Healthy

The elderly who are healthy or the elderly fit are individuals living independently at home or in sheltered accommodation, they are freely ambulant and without significant disease conditions. They do not receive regular prescribed medication.

The elderly sick or infirm:

These are individuals over 65 years of age, dependent on others for activities of daily living, and sometimes in institutionalized homes. Some are not independently mobile - they cannot help themselves and may require regular prescribed drugs. Those with different ailments or disease conditions which might be age related and the elderly handicapped, apart from these health problems of the elderly, there are other issues that might be challenging to them or pose as sources of challenges to them.

Challenges can be seen as problems that can serve as hindrances to achieve a particular goal, aim or vision. Aging process and being an elderly is supposed to be something all people look forward to and to be enjoyed, but so many things in life might work against achieving this.

What are the challenges of the elderly?

Challenges come in different forms, each with its adverse effects

Physical challenges.

The physical challenges include Mal-treatment, Use of abusive words, beating and Neglect. The above mentioned challenges are mostly from the children and relations especially of the not so strong (frail) elderly who could not help himself in carrying out basic needs of life. People attending to them might have become fed up and therefore become aggressive and unfriendly. Most times we may not be quick to blame those care-givers because this situation would have become a burden to them. They do not have full charge of their time and freedom;

whatever their plan, the challenged elderly schedule has to be slotted in. This could become boring and disturbing to the extent that irritation and resentment of the sick may set in and this will lead to maltreatment, beating, use of abusive words and eventually neglect which could be disastrous to the elderly,

Cases have been reported of elderly people who were beaten or flogged by care givers and locked up for days without food, especially the once with incontinence, paralysis or those bed ridden from one ailment or the other and those who have lost their sight. Life becomes so uninteresting, unfulfilling and wish of death sets in.

The second challenge for consideration is Marginalization. This is a situation whereby people are not included, carried along or involved in decisions or contributions that have an effect on their welfare and wellbeing. When we talk about marginalization, it could sometimes occur within the family when some people in the family feel that the elderly person is too old to make meaningful contributions to decisions made within the family. This is not common, especially in the African setting where our elderly people are held in high esteem because of their accumulated wealth of experience and knowledge over years.

Looking at the issue of marginalization it is very obvious when government policies are considered. Most times the government has no policies to ensure the welfare of the elderly people and when there is any in place, it is done without even seeking the opinion of the people concerned. The government simply plans and executes for the people.

The society where these elderly people also live has no programs involving their participation or their contribution; they are neglected in all the activities and welfare packages meant to make life easy and enjoyable for the human race.

Financial problem

The third challenge faced by the elderly is on finance. Most of the elderly people had no formal education to earn them a government job to qualify them for pensions. Even those who retired to become pensioners earn some meager money from the government which is not even enough for their survival and because their strength is failing them, they find it difficult to fend for themselves financially to meet their daily needs and health concerns. This is one of the reasons why people are not living far into old age in the African continent before their death.

Psychological challenges

Fourthly, constant neglect and marginalization of these people by both the

children, the community, the government and lack of provision of welfare amenities to support them at old age, coupled with inadequate support from the children or the government many elderly people drift towards loneliness and depression which at times might lead to psychiatric problems. Occasionally this leads to suicide attempts by the elderly.

Health challenges

As one advances in age, the organs in the body undergo degenerative changes which results in decrease in the functions of the organs leading to incompetence and disease conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, liver problems, kidney problems, and blindness and so on. Some of these health challenges become so problematic that life becomes uninteresting and presents the individuals as sources of burdens to the relations.

Housing problems.

This is a major issue that is just getting noticed among the black race, the reason been that in the olden days, old people were being taken care of by their wards and the community. But things are changing now because most wards have travelled for greener pastures to the urban centers and even abroad without making adequate housing provision for their old ones and the strong bonds that existed in the community are no more like before.

Also we have some exceptional cases of the elderly without children, who will then take care of those. Most of these people have no homes and the government has no planned or structured housing projects for the old ones. Even at times when the elderly has money to rent house to stay, people do not want to give houses for rent to them.

Transportation problems

In advanced countries, organized transport system is put in place for all citizens including the old people, special programs on their movement from one place to the other. This is not available in this country and it is a major challenge to the elderly persons.

In conclusion, the elderly in this country is faced with a lot of challenges. This is mainly due to the changing lifestyle of the populace resulting in less societal and cultural care for the elderly.

But what is the solution? There must be an institutionalized policy for the care of the elderly in the Nigeria. The government at all levels including the Federal,

State and Local Government must address the housing, health, transportation feeding and financial needs of the elderly people. Government intervention is not only necessary it is very urgent.